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Men from the Dreadnoughts

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civilization? Sergei Georgiyevich Gorshkov, Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union and strategist, has written

a book that will influence navies and governments for the rest of this century.

BOOK REVIEWS

Baynham, Henry. *Men from the Dreadnoughts*. London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1976. 265pp.

The first 15 years of the 20th century witnessed the transformation of the Royal Navy from an unchallenged imperial police into a force striving to maintain sea control in the face of German naval expansionism. The change in roles brought many changes in material; new types of ships and new equipment, all having a major impact on naval personnel. The problems of officer adjustment to change, of adjustment of old values to new requirements were not easily solved. Thus one saw the Scott-Beresford dispute regarding the importance of gunnery. One saw the continued building of warships ill-adapted to the new mission and even the hounding from office of a First Sea Lord because of his lack of sympathy with nostalgia. The need for a redeployment which does not accord with the self-image of the service has caused comparable problems for the U.S. Navy. After 25 years as a force for the imperial projection of seapower, the U.S. Navy is being forced to attack the problem of maintaining sea control, a problem brought into historical focus by the Strategy and Policy course of the Naval War College.

Strategy is not the only field in which one can learn from history. Bureaucratic organizations in general and armed services in particular are social systems, which are similar to some degree. Similar social systems exhibit similar behaviors in response to similar problems. It is the opportunity to examine the present through the

perspective of history that makes the subject of Henry Baynham's *Men from the Dreadnoughts* of great professional interest to those concerned with the present and future of the U.S. Navy. Problems of strategy, problems of technology, problems of officer competence are only relevant if the enlisted men can and will perform. The third of Baynham's series dealing with the lower deck of the Royal Navy, *Men from the Dreadnoughts*, lacks the romance of the earlier volumes, of Trafalgar and of Bias Bay pirates. Instead of third-class cruisers on the China station, the typical R.N. environment was becoming Dreadnoughts exercising in home waters. The change in environment had a marked effect on the lower deck but this was overshadowed by requirements for new skills, which brought new types of men into the service with consequent need for change in training and discipline; a need for an entirely new lower deck social structure.

Baynham has intensively interviewed 50 survivors of the Edwardian Navy and his book is in the main an ordering of this oral history—an attempt to recreate “how it was” in the tradition begun by Studs Terkel. This is in itself doubtless a commendable goal (albeit of limited current applicability); nevertheless it is not completely met. We learn about the days of fame of the gunner but not about his life after his status decreased with the advent of centralized fire direction. We are told that much of traditional discipline and routine could not be applied in the early destroyers and submarines but no details emerge. Above all the book is silent regarding

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the effect of, and adaptation to, social change in the case of senior petty officers, a problem and a group of major importance.

A simple count of Baynham's interviewees shows that the traditional (seaman, stoker, Royal marine) branches of the service produced few who rose above petty officer while the new specialist branches produced few who failed to reach above that rank. This apparent career disappointment accompanied by loss of status cannot but have had an effect on discipline, especially a discipline made less rigorous by the introduction of the new specialists. Baynham discusses the problems of discipline but does not look for general causation. We are told of the 1906 near mutiny of the stokers at Portsmouth but not whether it was unique, nor are we informed of nonproximate causes of the incident. Thus the student concerned with understanding recent problems such as those on *Constellation* is left curious but unsatisfied. Symptoms of stress in the social system of the Royal Navy are described to us, but with no attempt to link them into a coherent diagnosis. Although he points to increasing democratization of avenues of promotion, Baynham is satisfied with childhood socialization as an explanation for the differences in promotion between boy entrants who became a chief yeoman of signals and a leading stoker. The Royal Navy as a socializing agency and the effects of branching on career are both ignored.

The writing of history can never be absolute; it is colored by the perspective of subsequent events. Who, now, is concerned with Mussolini's achievement in draining the Pontine Marshes? Baynham attempts to avoid perspective and in doing so considerably decreases the value of his book. We have a collection of chapters rather than a development of a thesis. Nevertheless it is valuable as an introduction to a largely neglected area of study. Baynham's tapes are

presumably available and, together with interviews with others who served in the same period (on actuarial grounds there should be more than 55) and searches of the relevant documents, the data for the execution of some well-planned research is available. The core of my problem with the book lies in the fact that research cannot succeed without a well-defined objective. Baynham has performed a service in opening up an important data source. However, in that his work lacks a clear focus (and indeed in a critical sense—he spends pages on stories I have heard on several continents with different protagonists), he does not significantly add to our knowledge, although expanding our store of information.

What then has Baynham accomplished? He has produced a readable view of naval life in the period. My first reading of the book was accomplished in a single sitting. While reading I was engrossed, but on closing the book my questions started and were not answered by detailed searches. So far Baynham has no competitors but the importance of his subject demands more heavy-weight efforts. Until research (which depends on research funding) extends in this direction, *Men from the Dreadnoughts* cannot be overlooked.

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Brown, Weldon A. *Prelude to Disaster: The American Role in Vietnam, 1940-1963*. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975. 278pp.

The experience of reading this book parallels, in an odd way, some of the events it describes: One has the definite sensation, the further one progresses, of sinking slowly into a quagmire. Admittedly this imparts vividness to the account, but it is not, one suspects, the impression Professor Brown sought to produce in his history of the American role in Vietnam from 1940 to 1963.